

ILLUSTRATIONS

OF

MAXIMS AND PRINCIPLES

OF

EDUCATION,

IN THE SECOND BOOK OF

ROUSSEAU'S EMILE.

IN

FOUR LETTERS

TO THE

MOTHER OF A YOUNG FAMILY,  
DISPOSED TO ADOPT THEM:

BUT EMBARRASSED

BY DIFFICULTIES IN THE EXECUTION,

AND PARTICULARLY

BY THE OBJECTIONS AND PREJUDICES OF  
HER FRIENDS.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

OF

EDUCATION

AND

TEACHING



BY THE DIRECTOR

OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

LONDON



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# ILLUSTRATIONS,

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## LETTER I.

MADAM,

**P**ARENTS, who wish to educate their children, are so inconsiderable in number, that each may feel the usual inconveniences of singularity: and I wonder not, a young woman, brought up as you have been, to regard fashion as the standard of right and wrong, should have a difficulty in surmounting those inconveniences. But you feel as a mother: and the same tenderness and goodness which render you polite,

B

give

give a peculiar ardor and anxiety to your affection and care of your children. Softness, address, and persuasion are the privileges of your sex; and they eminently qualify you for the first gentle and interesting steps which should be taken in education. But in this, as in other matters most important to their preservation and honor, women in general are destitute of information; and either act without principles and at random, or commit their children wholly to the care of others. Your desire to avoid the common misfortune, is your praise: but having shewn a disposition to take Rousseau for your monitor, you find yourself embarrassed with prejudices, objections, and difficulties, which your friends throw in your way, with a zeal and sometimes a resentment that alarm you.

Rousseau

Rouffeau has animadverted on the errors and follies of the world with petulance: he has therefore nearly lost his labour, and rendered his name and his principles unpopular. When you are convinced, as I imagine you must often be, that his principles are just; the native candour and sincerity of your mind will adopt them. But admit not a spark of the fire of his zeal: it might be necessary to those glowing and brilliant thoughts which are the charms of his productions; but it would parch up that milky kindness, and soft patience which are the principal instruments of your sex, in removing obstacles to your wishes, as well as in the proper management and education of your children.

I wonder not at your having been advised to adopt those regulations and

maxims which you approve in the works of Rousseau, without professing yourself his disciple : the objections of your friends being rather to his name, than to his productions ; which, you say, very few of them have perused. In that case, you might have had high commendations for the measures which now subject you to blame. But your integrity and honor would not admit of such an artifice. You must therefore bear some of the usual inconveniences of every species of honesty : and you may be assisted by the recollection, that the zeal which embarrasses you is often well intended, and the prepossessions which appear to you most groundless and unreasonable have many circumstances which give them claims to your consideration and perhaps your respect.

But



But you say, the tendency of some parts of his writings to inflame passions, of themselves sufficiently warm; and the authentic dishonor cast on his name by the *Confessions* he has left of the secret transactions of his youth, are objections, which you cannot meet, consistent with the delicacy you would cherish in your own mind, and the reputation you would wish to preserve.

I do not see, that you have the slightest concern in those objections, whether justly or unjustly founded. Mr. Rousseau may have delineated a scene in a novel, over which most men would have drawn a veil. He has *confessed* to the world a series of puerile errors, follies, and vices, in connection with their causes and motives, which most men would have concealed. The only

difficulty, or even matter of conversation, on these subjects, is, whether the author was right or wrong, blameable or commendable, in the publication of them? This is a question, in which you are not interested in the remotest degree; and, in your place, I would never suffer it to perplex me.

You are told, Rousseau was a bad man: the tendency of his writings is therefore to be suspected; and his principles to be regarded as dangerous and pernicious.

I do not believe Rousseau was a bad man: but I would not have you enter into a discussion of the subject; for you are not concerned in it. You might even admit the most uncandid and reproachful opinion of him. For  
you

you are not to make him your husband, your friend ; or to entrust any thing to his heart or his passions. You find lessons, directions, and principles in his works, which approve themselves to your judgement; and therefore you adopt them. His understanding may be of use to you ; though his temper may have been a dishonor and a torment to himself.

Besides, the inference from character to principles, and from the incidents or habits of a man's life to the utility of his productions, is not candidly or justly drawn. It is used among the common artifices of defamation ; and very weak minds are imposed upon by apparent connections, like those of causes and effects. But you can certainly have no great difficulties in combating

such modes of reasoning, or in defeating such artifices, if you should think yourself obliged to attend to them.

No man sits down to write, any thing beyond trifles, until those passions which form the peculiarities of his character have passed their meridian, and have determined their orbits. It must be, on the experience he has had, that he arranges his opinions and principles. If the rules and maxims he recommends are in opposition to those on which he has been educated, the irregularity of his life and the defects of his character, give them weight and authority, instead of furnishing objections to them. For the measures pursued in his education, having produced a vicious and unhappy disposition, he seems to conceive it a duty to warn the publick against those



those measures, and to advise others of different tendencies. The vices and miseries of his mind, so far from disqualifying him for these services, are the circumstances which entitle him to peculiar attention.

The case of Rousseau seems to be of this kind. Though I am myself firmly persuaded, that if all men were to make *confessions* equally sincere, we should find Rousseau in the favorable minority; yet he had committed errors of a nature to embitter his recollections; his passions were capriciously formed; and his temper became acrimonious by the effects of disappointments on a lively and irritable fancy. These circumstances rendered him unhappy, in spite of a vigorous, penetrating, and comprehensive genius. It was the favorite

vorite employment of his leisure hours (I speak on his own authority) to trace his *miserics* to their causes: and this is the origin of his hints, directions, and lessons on education.

To apprehend danger from Rousseau, there should be some reasons to suppose he wished his disciples to be like himself, and such measures adopted as had produced his temper and character; but his utmost zeal and eloquence are employed to deter men from those measures: and he has consigned his name to popular reproach, and dishonor, by publishing the private follies of his life, to give the greater weight and effect to his admonitions. The faults of Rousseau are, therefore, particular reasons for giving attention to

to his precepts and directions on education.

But, if all general objections to the author were removed, you would be furrounded with difficulties, according to your account, on the reasonableness, and utility of his maxims.

As you have confined your difficulties to the second book of his *Emile*, which, however, contains the distinguishing principles of his system, I will attend you through that book; and begin with his hints on, ‘crying as a language.’

The sounds, first uttered by children, are impelled by impressions on their senses, either of pleasure or pain: and it is not till they have found certain offices

offices and assistances attending certain sounds, that they use them as language. The offices being agreeable to them, they utter the sounds voluntarily, and without the impressions which first occasioned them. But as the first efforts of every species of artifice are awkward and obvious; it requires no great discernment, to distinguish between crying, the effect of painful impressions, demanding relief; and crying, the effect of the first rudiments of caprice and tyranny. This discernment, however, we find common nurses to be destitute of: and I should imagine, your doubts and embarrassments on the subject arise from this cause. You cultivate in your own mind the truths insisted on by Rousseau. Your child, unperceived by you, is receiving lessons of a contrary nature from its nurse. When  
your



your experiments, are *occasionally* made, you are astonished that things, appearing so reasonable, should be impracticable: you retire in despair to other occupations; and the nurse to her former habits and practices on your child. You discharge not half the duties of a mother; and consequently partake not half the pleasures, if, while you feed your child at your bosom, it spend not by much the greater part of its time under your eye. An imagination and taste much less fertile and just than your's, might soon obviate the common objections to the constant company of children; and render the management of them the most unembarrassing, the most delightful, and even the most elegant employment. Until this be the case, you will find your theory, and the practice of your nurse, produce

contra-

contradictions ; and the *increase of knowledge will be to you the increase of sorrow.*

I remember, on a visit to a family, being shewn into a room, where I perceived an infant almost in convulsions ; surrounded by the father, mother, governess, nurse, and other attendants : all of whom, except the father, discovered evident marks of consternation and distress. The father beckoned to me, but with a faltering resolution, to be silent and not to interfere. The child struggled and cried till it grew weary, and fell asleep. I had recovered from my surprise and apprehension, sufficiently to comprehend the purpose of the process. The father said, with an affectation of triumph, but with the tone of a man relieved from exquisite

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pain,

pain, 'The crying of children should  
 ' not be obeyed. I was determined  
 ' not to take him up if he had cried for  
 ' hours. Don't you think I am right  
 ' Sir?' I turned to the nurse, 'Do  
 ' you always take up the child when it  
 ' cries?' I had no answer. I saw the  
 mother's eyes suffused with tears, 'You  
 ' seem, madam, to be distressed.' She  
 murmured some imprecations on the  
 name of Rousseau, which drew the at-  
 tention of the father; who had no diffi-  
 culty in maintaining the reasonableness  
 of his general principle, though he un-  
 derstood not the proper method of ap-  
 plying it. I attempted, I believe in  
 vain, to prevent a difference of opinion  
 from affecting their domestic har-  
 mony: and the nurse took the oppor-  
 tunity of stealing away the sleeping in-  
 fant, with the same emotions she would  
 have

have felt at escaping with him from a lion's den.

As the father understood not the application of his own principles, and his family were the more confirmed in dislike and aversion by every attempt he made to introduce them; it would perhaps have been happy for his children, if he had never read Rousseau, or thought on the subject of education. For the occasional, harsh, and unsuccessful experiments he made, increased the diligence of the mother, governess, and nurse, in obeying the cries of the child; and the evil to be remedied must soon have been rendered inveterate.

I suppose this to be the case; for I perceive the father inclined to the common error, in which feeble speculatists always  
shelter



shelter themselves after unsuccessful experiments, 'that what is good in theory ' may be evil in practice.' It may be difficult, or perhaps impracticable, in some situations, to reduce a just theory to practice. But this furnishes only an exception to a general rule. Those who fail in the application of just principles to the uses of common life, either do not understand them, or cannot compute the force of those resistances, which obstruct all real practice. When you, not only comprehend a general truth, but can calculate or remove the resistances in your way ; you will always find, ' whatever is right ' in theory, is right in practice.'

You may alledge, that I only explain; but do not remove your difficulty. How are you to avoid op-  
C positions

positions to your measures, from your nurses and servants? They must be comprehended in your plan of education; or you must wholly bring up your own children. If you chuse servants, for the docility and candour of their dispositions; the condescension with which you inform and place confidence in them, can hardly fail of insuring their concurrence in your views and obedience to your will. But as disciples, especially in their rank, are always imperfect in their lessons—to succeed as you wish, your child must be generally under your own eye. You will then find no difficulty in ascertaining, and pointing out to others, the few inarticulate sounds which form the language of an infant; and indicate its feelings and wants: or in surpressing the first symptoms of that caprice, which  
discovers

discovers itself in a habit of crying; and renders children troublesome and sometimes odious to all around them.

I have gone farther into this part of the subject, that I was warranted by my engagement, to attend you only through the second book of Emile; where it is touched upon only in a summary and retrospective manner. But you seemed desirous I should be explicit; and that must be my excuse.

You say, the animadversions on you are numerous and sometimes severe, for not assigning hours of discipline and confinement; having the rudiments of sciences committed to memory; or schools provided, for those of your children, who having just learned the

use of their limbs, are running about your house and gardens.

You know I have been a father; and lost an only child under some circumstances, which had more than ordinary effect in embittering my disappointment. From the difficulty of accommodating my pursuits and habits to the education of a girl, and from peculiar inconveniences in my situation, I committed her to others; who never brought her to me but to be reprimanded for her faults, which were in truth their own. My distress of mind on those occasions always renewed and invigorated my resolution to sacrifice every thing to the duty and pleasure of having her always with me; and leading her in the path of life, in that manner which a parent only can do. I made several unsuccessful



cessful efforts with this view: and had not compleatly effected my purpose a year before she died. If I could explain to you, the various emotions of my mind on the whole of this occasion; the satisfaction I felt at being right myself, and making her happy with me, though at great and expensive inconveniencies; and the poignant regret at losing her, from a supposition that I might have met those inconveniences sooner—you would attend in silence to the importunities of your friends on a subject they do not understand. I shall never be able to read the following passage, without being instantly summoned before my own conscience with a sentiment of awe and anxiety similar to what I should feel in the presence of an omniscient judge, whose acquittal and approbation were necessary to my

C 3

happiness.

‘ Men! be humane—it is your first  
 ‘ duty: be humane to all conditions,  
 ‘ to every age, to all things which have  
 ‘ a relation to man. What kind of  
 ‘ wisdom can you possess, that is void  
 ‘ of humanity? Love the innocence  
 ‘ of infancy; favour its sports; its  
 ‘ pleasures; its amiable instincts. Who  
 ‘ of you has not sometimes regretted  
 ‘ that period, when the smile is always  
 ‘ on the lip, and the soul always at ease?  
 ‘ Why would you take from those lit-  
 ‘ tle and innocent creatures, the enjoy-  
 ‘ ment of a season so short and tran-  
 ‘ sient; of a blessing so precious;  
 ‘ which they cannot abuse? Why  
 ‘ would you fill with bitterness and  
 ‘ with sorrows those first years, so ra-  
 ‘ pid in their progress; and which will  
 ‘ never return either for them or for  
 ‘ you? Fathers! know ye the mo-  
 ment,

' ment, when death awaits your chil-  
 ' dren? Prepare not regret and for-  
 ' row for yourselves by depriving them  
 ' of the few momente which nature has  
 ' given them. As soon as they can  
 ' feel the pleasure of existence, enable  
 ' them to enjoy it; contrive that, when-  
 ' ever god calls them, they may not die  
 ' without having tasted life.'

I have the honor to be, &c.

London, May 10,  
 1783.

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 LETTER II.

MADAM.

YOU very justly observe, while the fundamental principles of any science or art are involved in obscurity, we proceed with apprehension and danger in the application of them to the purposes of life. You complain of ambiguity in the following important passage. ‘ A man, truly free, wills only  
 ‘ what he may perform; and performs  
 ‘ what he *pleases*. This is my fundamental maxim. Let it be applied to  
 ‘ infancy; and all the rules of education will flow from it.’\*—If Rousseau had been more a philosopher than an orator, he probably would have expressed

\* Emile B. II.

ed



fed the maxim thus: ‘ A man truly  
 ‘ wills only what he may perform;  
 ‘ and performs what he *wills*. There  
 ‘ is a settled harmony of his desires and  
 ‘ abilities, which fits him for his situ-  
 ‘ ation; and renders him competent to  
 ‘ his duties.’ But in stating even a  
 maxim, he generally insinuates an  
 advantage or disadvantage in its effects;  
 and often sacrifices accuracy to elo-  
 quence. The phrase he uses here is  
 equivocal; and should have been a-  
 voided in a treatise containing the  
 principles of an important science.  
 Rousseau seems sensible of having  
 offended in this respect; and as-  
 cribes his apparent ambiguities and  
 contradictions to the imperfection of  
 language. I do not recollect an in-  
 stance, in which he is equivocal, or at  
 variance with himself, meerly from the  
 imper-

imperfection of language. But I think he never states an important proposition, without instantly taking fire, becoming enamoured; and employing his vivid and fruitful fancy to induce others to adore it. ‘A man truly free, performs what he wills,’ i, e, he is neither a slave to the will of another, nor does he harbour desires on unattainable subjects: it may therefore, in a restrained sense, be said, he performs what he *pleases*. But the expression being liable to a double sense, Euclid, Newton, Helvetius or Hume would have scrupulously avoided the use of it.

This ambiguity, the source of the perplexity, and perhaps the occasion of the peculiar interest and entertainment we find in the works of  
of

of Rousseau, is owing to the fervor of his imagination, which conceives a passion for or against every thing it touches; and is intensely and wholly employed in recommending it to the esteem or abhorrence of the world.

On reading a few pages, you find his imagination cools and he explains himself so as not to be misunderstood.

‘ He who performs what he wills is  
 ‘ happy, if his powers are equal to his  
 ‘ purposes: this is the case of man in  
 ‘ a state of nature. He who performs  
 ‘ what he wills, if his desires surpass  
 ‘ his abilities, is not happy: this is the  
 ‘ case with children, in the same state.  
 ‘ They enjoy, even in that of nature,  
 ‘ but an imperfect liberty, resembling  
 ‘ that which men enjoy in a state of civil  
 ‘ society.’—‘ There are two kinds of  
 depend-

' dependence, that of things, which is  
 ' from nature; that of men, which is  
 ' from society. The dependence of  
 ' things, having no morality, is not in-  
 ' jurious to liberty, and does not en-  
 ' gender vices. The dependence of  
 ' men, being uncertain and irregular,  
 ' is productive of them: and it is by  
 ' means of it, the master and slave mu-  
 ' tually corrupt each other.'

' Preserve your child therefore, only  
 ' in the dependence of *things*: you will  
 ' then follow the order of nature in the  
 ' progress of his education.'—' Apply  
 ' to his indiscreet wishes only *physical*  
 ' obstacles, or the punishments which  
 ' arise from the *actions themselves*, and  
 ' which he will remember on proper oc-  
 ' casions: without *forbidding* his doing  
 ' ill it will be sufficient to *prevent* him.

' Experi-



‘ Experience, or inability should serve  
 ‘ to him for law. Yield not any thing  
 ‘ to his desires, because he requests,  
 ‘ but because he wants it. Let him  
 ‘ know nothing of *obedience* when he  
 ‘ acts, nor of *dominion* when another  
 ‘ acts for him. Let him equally feel  
 ‘ his liberty in his own and in your  
 ‘ actions. Supply his want of strength  
 ‘ precisely as he stands in need of it to  
 ‘ become free, but not imperious; that  
 ‘ by receiving your services with a kind  
 ‘ of humiliation, he may aspire after  
 ‘ the moment, when he shall be able to  
 ‘ do without it, and have the honor to  
 ‘ serve himself.’

At the distance of sixteen pages  
 he resumes the subject (perhaps for  
 the third or fourth time) and illu-  
 strates while he removes an impor-

important objection to it. ‘ Almost  
 ‘ every instrument has been tried, ex-  
 ‘ cept one, and that the only one  
 ‘ which can succeed; liberty duly re-  
 ‘ gulated. No man should undertake  
 ‘ the education of a child, who cannot  
 ‘ conduct it at pleasure, meerly by the  
 ‘ laws of possibility and impossibility.  
 ‘ The sphere of the one and the other  
 ‘ being equally unknown to the child,  
 ‘ it may be extended or contracted a-  
 ‘ round him as occasions may require.  
 ‘ He may be chained down, he may be  
 ‘ stimulated, he may be checked, by  
 ‘ the single rein of necessity, without  
 ‘ his murmuring at it. He may be  
 ‘ rendered pliant and docile by the  
 ‘ meer force of things, without giving  
 ‘ vice an occasion of taking root in him;  
 ‘ for the passions never rouse themselves  
 into

‘ into action, when it is to be done  
‘ without effect.

‘ Never give your pupil any species  
‘ of verbal instructions—he should be  
‘ instructed only by experience. In-  
‘ flict on him no kind of punishment,  
‘ for he knows not what it is to be in  
‘ fault : never make him ask your par-  
‘ don for he knows not how to offend  
‘ you. *Destitute of all morality* in his  
‘ actions, he cannot do any thing which  
‘ is morally evil, and which deserves  
‘ chastisement or reprimand.’

Here, as you observe, the imputa-  
tions on the designs or intentions of  
Rousseau, are of a serious and impor-  
tant nature. Your friends alarm you  
with references to the mind of an infant,  
as to a fresh and vigorous soil, which  
produces

produces rank weeds as well as useful and beautiful plants. They solemnly maintain, the limits of right and wrong in sentiments and actions, cannot be too early or too accurately ascertained; and they plead the authority of Mr. Locke for assigning to children the reasons of every injunction, and of every measure taken in their education. But the author very properly observes ‘ Before  
 ‘ the age of reason we have no ideas of  
 ‘ moral beings, or of social relations;  
 ‘ it is necessary therefore to avoid as  
 ‘ much as possible, the use of those  
 ‘ words which express them, lest the  
 ‘ child should immediately annex wrong  
 ‘ ideas to them, of which we may not  
 ‘ be informed, and which, afterwards,  
 ‘ it may be difficult to remove. The  
 ‘ first wrong idea that enters his head  
 ‘ becomes the seed of error and of vice.

It



‘ It is to that first step, we should  
 ‘ give particular attention.’—‘ Take  
 ‘ care that while he is affected only by  
 ‘ sensible objects, all his ideas confine  
 ‘ themselves to sensations. Order it,  
 ‘ that he may perceive nothing around  
 ‘ him but the material world : other-  
 ‘ wise, you may be assured, that he will  
 ‘ not hear you, or that he will form such  
 ‘ fantastic notions of the moral world  
 ‘ you speak of, as you will not efface  
 ‘ in the whole of your life.’

This subject cannot be fully considered, without including his principal paradox.

‘ May I venture here to disclose the  
 ‘ greatest, the most important, and the  
 ‘ most useful of all the rules of education. It is not to gain time ; it is to  
 ‘ lose it. Ye common readers, par-

D

don

‘ don my paradoxes : they are formed  
 ‘ unavoidably by a man who reflects ;  
 ‘ and whatever you may say to me, I  
 ‘ had rather be remarkable for para-  
 ‘ doxes, than be infested with preju-  
 ‘ dices. The most dangerous interval  
 ‘ of life is that between our birth and  
 ‘ the age of twelve. It is the time when  
 ‘ errors and vices take root; while we  
 ‘ possess no instrument to destroy them;  
 ‘ and when the instrument arrives, the  
 ‘ roots are so deeply fixed that it is  
 ‘ too late to tear them up. If children  
 ‘ could leap at once from the mother’s  
 ‘ breast to the age of reason, the edu-  
 ‘ cation now given, would suit them.  
 ‘ But according to the progress of na-  
 ‘ ture an education of a different kind  
 ‘ is necessary. It is necessary, that  
 ‘ we should *take no account of the*  
 ‘ *soul*, until it has acquired all its  
 ‘ faculties.

‘ faculties. For it is impossible it  
 ‘ should perceive the light you present  
 ‘ to it, while it is blind; and that it  
 ‘ should follow, in an immense plain  
 ‘ of ideas, a route which reason is still  
 ‘ so lightly tracing for the best eyes \*.’

Paradoxes, like points of wit, and other arts of composition, are sometimes usefully, sometimes injuriously introduced. If Rousseau had defined his terms, and explained his propositions with the simplicity and perspicuity of a mathematician, he would not have been misunderstood, or misrepresented by the few persons who would have

D 2

perused

\* Emile, B. II. page 191. As I must oppose passages at some distance from each other, I shall mention the pages. The edition I quote from, is that of Amsterdam, small 8vo. 1765.

perused his work. But by involving them in similes, allusions and paradoxes, and giving the whole the form of a novel, he draws the attention of multitudes, who are fond of a little perplexity, admire his wit; but not understanding his maxims, either adopt or abuse them without reason.

State his general proposition to any of your acquaintance, in the following manner, and they will acquiesce in it.

‘ If an object be unseasonable or unattainable in the present moment, and seasonable and attainable in a future, it is better to lose the moment than the object; for by being too solicitous to save time, we lose all the purposes for which we would employ it.’ But there being no apparent contradiction, no occasion of surprise,



prize, you may find it difficult to draw their attention to it. Whether, on estimating the advantages and disadvantages of this species of writing, Rousseau is to be commended for using it on the subject of education, I cannot at this time pretend to determine. I am only pointing out the causes of apparent contradictions in the writer, and of misapprehensions in his readers, in order to prevent, at least among your friends, the injury which may be done to the general subject of this work.—

The ruling idea, through the whole of *Emile*, is, that every species of care in respect to man has its season;—that a certain time is requisite to *develop* or *form* the *faculties* of the body and mind; and that a quantity (which per-

haps the Author was inclined to ascertain) of simple sensations on those faculties is necessary, before the mind can employ itself in the business of reflection and reasoning; or have any ideas of moral obligations, and a moral character.

If this opinion were not often obscured by the brilliancy of his eloquence, and involved in apparent contradictions, by the introduction of paradoxes, most men would acquiesce in it. Perceiving life to be divided, like the year, into spring, summer, autumn, and winter, they would respectfully attend the operations of nature in each period; and not destroy the hopes and enjoyment of all the seasons, by attempting to render the year a continued harvest.

The

The common method of education, is owing to this absurd and ruinous species of avarice. Man is of no value in society, or, as some people are pleased to determine, in the sight of God, until he has acquired reason, morals, and religion. They therefore think it is impossible to be too early in obtaining those acquisitions.—You see, even here, the motive of their injurious anxiety and destructive haste, is in some degree respectable: for it is a desire, not to lose a moment in securing for their children, what they esteem the most valuable of all possessions, a reasonable mind, a virtuous disposition, and the approbation of the Deity.

You ask, with impetuosity, why do not men imitate nature? Ask the bird, who is intent on picking up the seed,

D 4

why

why he does not imitate the farmer? We are at a much greater distance from nature, than the bird from the farmer: and one of the most useful lessons to you, in the acquisition of knowledge, is to avoid contempt and impatience at those who do not keep up with your steps.

You say, that no patience can bear the tone of authority and wisdom, with which the most ignorant persons would reprimand you on these subjects. The more ignorant they are, the less reason you can have for impatience. Have I not seen you smile, with a complacent kind of pity, at the solemn and earnest admonitions of a servant, not to approach certain haunted places in the appurtenances and neighbourhood of your house? While you are, your-  
self,



self, candid and diligent, in the acquisition of useful information, and in the application of it for the happiness of your family—you may surely treat your officious acquaintance, with the same obliging and compassionate attention which you paid to the servant and the ghosts.

‘But they would restrain and punish you for your opinions, if they had the power.’ It is happy they have not the power: you must therefore not be concerned at what may be their ineffectual inclinations. Recollect that Galileo languished in prison for discovering an important astronomical truth; that the greatest, wisest and best men, in almost all ages, have been harrassed and persecuted by the world they have benefited and blessed. And what

what have you to complain of?—that Ignorance will not suffer you to invade her dominions unmolested? Or that Prejudice, the most imperious, dogmatic, and obstinate of all spirits, will not permit you to dispute her authority without menace or danger?—Exercise the liberty you enjoy with Temper, Judgment, and Perseverance; endeavour, as much as you can, to enlarge its boundaries; and hope for the time, when governments shall be so enlightened as to protect men in their intellectual as well as corporeal rights. But to return to the subject.

Those who understand the terms and propositions, as stated by Rousseau, respecting the delay of moral and scientific instructions, make the following objections:

I. That

I. That his general maxim, ‘not to gain time, but to lose it,’ is itself an absurdity; and implies a reflection, on that nature he affects to imitate and adore; as if any important process could be effected by an actual loss of time.—And

II. That many of his directions and rules, in regard to children, are in direct opposition to this maxim.—

III. That the idea of infancy as the sleep of reason, is not warranted by such facts as would justify the slightest analogy; and is therefore calculated to mislead and injure, instead of informing and benefitting the world.

IV. That the impressions made on children being always deep and lasting;  
and

and their memories retentive and capable of improvement;—we ought to avail ourselves of these advantages; deposit in their memories all the maxims and principles which may be of future use, and bias and prepossess their minds in favor of virtue.—

I shall consider these in their order; and give you all the assistance I can, on the distinguishing principle of Rousseau's system.

It is true, that nothing is ever *lost* in the processes of nature; and therefore, all plans which imply waste and loss of time, are unnatural, and unjustifiable. Rousseau seems to have been as fully convinced of this truth as any of those persons who have blamed him. And in the present passage,



sage, he certainly does not mean, that time should be actually *lost*, and children neglected; for he immediately subjoins, that ‘the interval from the birth of a child to the age of twelve, is the most dangerous of his life.’ The obscurity of his general maxim; and consequently the merit of the paradox which it forms, is owing to an inaccurate use of the word education, through the whole Treatise. The design of the work, is to recommend a prudent and on the whole an admirable species of attention to children; a mode of assisting the development of their faculties, which he calls education. In order to heighten the advantages of his system, he throws the customs and measures in common practice into a shade; and yet he denominates them education. When he is seducing your judgment,

ment, it is in behalf of education; and when he is ridiculing your folly, it is for the employment it finds in education. These double and opposite meanings, in the application of the same term, create a perplexity which might have a good effect in comedy, or satire; but is distressing and perhaps contributes more than any thing to defeat the great purposes of the author, in an elementary and important work.

I have no difficulty however in affirming that nothing could have been further from Rousseau's intention, than what is commonly ascribed to him—A desire that the time between the birth of a child and the age of twelve, might be sunk, lost, or spent at random. He says forcibly, it had better  
be

be lost, then misemployed; and his directions to those who entertain the common notions of education are always to this effect: ‘ Do not gain this  
 ‘ time in your manner, but rather lose  
 ‘ it. Your measures are so injurious to  
 ‘ the future happiness of your children,  
 ‘ that they will be benefitted by the  
 ‘ loss; for ignorance is preferable to  
 ‘ error and the most awkward simpli-  
 ‘ city, than habits of artifice, servility,  
 ‘ and vice.’

To give the objection, under consideration its full force, I will translate the following passage, which, from the vague and perverse use of words, is, I think, the most exceptionable in the whole work \*. ‘ The first education  
 ‘ should

\* Emile, B. II. page 192.

“ should therefore be purely negative;  
 “ it consists, not in teaching virtue and  
 “ truth, but in guarding the heart  
 “ from vice, and the mind (*l’esprit*)  
 “ from error. If you could abstain  
 “ from doing any thing, and would  
 “ suffer nothing to be done; if you  
 “ could lead your pupil healthy and  
 “ robust to the age of twelve, without  
 “ having distinguished his right hand  
 “ from his left; at your first lessons,  
 “ the eyes of his understanding would  
 “ open to reason. Without prejudice,  
 “ and without habit, he would have  
 “ nothing in him to destroy the effect  
 “ of your cares. He would, very soon,  
 “ become in your hands the wisest of  
 “ men; and *in commencing by doing no-*  
 “ *thing*, you would produce a prodigy of  
 “ education.”

There



There is not a sentence of this paragraph, which he does not obscure by equivocal terms. His general principle is, that children not having judgment, reason, or any reflective faculty, should not have maxims and rules which require reflection forced on their memories. He therefore means their education, should be negative, as far as verbal lessons are concerned. As he always distinguishes between the mind (*l'esprit*) and the soul (*l'ame*) he is too unguarded in affirming that, by his own method; by preserving the child's constitution and health in a state to receive just impressions, and to form accurate though simple ideas, we do not teach the rudiments of truth and virtue.—But the most singular and offensive conceit is, that if the child be preserved from mental empiricism;

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in so much ignorance as not to distinguish his right hand from his left; his understanding, like some periodical planet, when the hand of time points to *twelve* on the circle of life, will rise in full glory, and exhibit a prodigy.—This, unquestionably, is the language of romance; but it may, in a great measure, be rendered into that of truth and common life. Rousseau wishes, and I think with reason, that the animal or sensitive powers of children should be first exercised and perfected in their simple operations. The processes he recommends would give his pupil a greater command of his limbs (of his hand for instance) than those commonly observed; but never having been required to compare or reason on the relation of objects to each other, he might without injury be literally

terally ignorant of such relative denominations as right and left. This, however, being only possible, the author's phrase alarms, or is treated with ridicule.—He is deemed much more inexcusable in the poetic licence of fixing on the precise period of twelve; and giving an instantaneous and miraculous birth to the understanding at that period. The stock of simple ideas, and that maturity of sensitive faculties which first give birth and exercise to the understanding and judgment, are obtained at very different periods in different constitutions. However, if it be near the age of twelve, Rousseau may plead the example of the Psalmist who says, ‘the days of man are three score years and ten,’ though great multitudes drop on each side of that period. Whether, in par-

particular instances, the faculties are in a condition to give the first employment to reason, at the age of five, or twelve, or twenty, the general doctrine of Rousseau is true, that until they arrive at that period, all lessons by maxims, whether scientific or moral, will not be justly apprehended; will be misunderstood, and form prejudices and errors which may never be removed.

If these observations be satisfactory, they may assist you in answering the second objection, ‘ That many of Rousseau’s directions and rules in regard to children, are in direct opposition to his general maxim.’

For if the delay he pleads for, be understood to relate to objects which  
require



require reflection and reasoning, all the directions he can give to assist the exercise and improve the vigor of the animal powers, will not be thought to contradict his maxim.

The idea of infancy, as the 'sleep of reason,' has given great offence, as well as occasion for ridicule. But this has been owing partly to the vanity and bigotry of philosophical sectaries. Rousseau seems to have been of the school of Plato, who was inclined to assign a time for the first use made of the animal faculties by an immaterial spirit. Any attempt of this kind would be treated as puerile, since the Epicurean philosophy, and the doctrines of materialism, have been revived and rendered respectable by the talents of Diderot, Helvetius, and Hume.

But let me entreat you to beware of these refinements. They would take up your life to pursue either of them through all its mazes and difficulties : and at your last hour, you would reflect that you had not only lost your time, but neglected your family, and the exercise of your most important and satisfactory duties. If Rousseau has suffered his philosophic prepossessions to appear, let his name be answerable for it ; but do not, in order to justify or condemn him, approach the dark and fathomless gulph of metaphysics.

It matters not, to all the essential purposes of education, whether, during the period in question, reason be asleep, or awake ; whether it be a faculty of an immaterial soul whose operations

rations are suspended until the organs are properly formed; or a faculty generated and produced in the constitution, and brought to use the moment it is wanted—the employment and duty of parents and governors are the same; to attend to the proper exercise of those organs, and to prepare in the best manner all the necessary instruments of reason.—I therefore cannot see, that the truth of Rousseau's opinion; or of his analogy, on the sleep of reason, is at all important to the credit or utility of his system of education.—

The last objection to his maxim is, perhaps the most difficult to be removed, ‘ That the impressions made  
‘ on children being deep and lasting;  
‘ and their memories retentive and ca-

' pable of improvement, we ought to  
 ' avail ourselves of these advantages ;  
 ' deposit in their memories all the  
 ' maxims and principles which may  
 ' be of future use ; and bias and pre-  
 ' possess their minds in favor of vir-  
 ' tue.'

On this part of the subject, Rousseau  
 is misunderstood from the impetuosity  
 of his zeal, and the advantage he takes  
 of a term which bears a double mean-  
 ing. By a distinction between the  
 ideas and images of things, the latter  
 of which only are recollected in in-  
 fancy, he attempts to prove, a child  
 has no memory. An advocate of  
 considerable abilities and reputation  
 at the English bar, has been observed  
 to defeat his own purpose on a jury,  
 and to lose the most important causes,



by endeavouring to prove too much. Where would be the use of that anxious attention which Rousseau recommends to the impressions made by outward objects and examples, if the ideas or images (it cannot signify which) were not deposited in the memory?

It is true, that the faculty displayed by children, who are held out to public admiration, for reciting passages, poems, and plays, has several delusive circumstances. It is also true, that impressions made on the memory of children, by objects suited to it, are indelible. Whether the real as well as spurious faculty be created by impressions and acts of sensation; or it be an assigned part of the brain, having a definite capacity, I will not determine.

termine. On the former supposition, children possess only a potential memory (viz. they may or may not have a memory, as circumstances may occur). On the latter, possessing the assigned parts of the constitution for the purposes of memory; they may be said to have the faculty, as well as men, though they have not practised its acts. Indeed, on this subject there is an inaccuracy in language; for the same term is applied to the seat of the impression, or the place where ideas may be said to be deposited, and to the act of recollecting them.—

However, it is the zeal of eloquence to persuade and convert; not the obscurity of the subject which has created the difficulty I am endeavouring to remove. The faculty by which a boy  
learns

learns a hundred verses in an evening; and while he repeats them to a tyrant in the morning, expunges them wholly from his mind; is an artificial and convulsive employment of several faculties which confound and injure his abilities. The impressions made by natural objects, and their various effects on our sensibility to pleasure and pain, are made on parts of the organization which retain them; and the recollection of them in the earliest infancy, enters into the first principles of motion, and into some of the first and most simple actions of life.

But to remove the objection to Rousseau, I must explain the distinction he makes between ideas and images; which you will perfectly understand, if you recollect the mode you  
took

took to learn your task at school. The task was assigned by the governess, under pretences favorable to your taste and understanding ; but you employed only your eye ; and recollected your lessons by the impression which the page, the lines and letters, and not the language and sentiments, made on you. Children therefore have no memory for sentiments, because sentiments make no impression on them ; but they have a memory for images, pages, lines, and letters.

Still it may be said, that we should avail ourselves of this faculty, to retain letters and symbols ; as they will always draw with them the sentiments we wish to impress. This leads us again within the sphere of Rousseau's system. What assurance have we, that



that these sentiments will ever be of use? For the lives of children are precarious. If we should have that assurance; why learn the symbols of unintelligible propositions, which may be much better impressed on the mind, when the propositions themselves are understood? The common custom is, to load the memory, with the *terms* of rules and principles in science and morals; and the governor, or tutor, is deemed most expert and commendable, who has obliged his pupil to commit to memory, the words which are symbols of the general elements of learning, before his judgment is formed, or his powers of reasoning are opened; *i. e.* before it is possible he should understand any of them. If the circumstances and duties of his life lead the pupil to apply, what is called,

called his knowledge, to use, he is always obliged to trace every step of his former education, and by inverted and unnatural efforts of the mind. Having occasion for principles, he is embarrassed and retarded by the habit of contenting himself with words; he is under the necessity of applying his mature thoughts and sentiments, to render intelligible the characters committed to his memory: and he finds the process of information and knowledge doubled, by the custom of teaching it, when it cannot be understood; and the necessity of learning it when it may be understood. This method is absurd and injurious; not only as it multiplies difficulties, without giving greater security for the attainment of the object; but misemploys time, which might be very usefully

fully and pleasantly improved. The general object of the modern system of education, has been as much as possible to anticipate the processes of nature. Instead of leading children from simple and particular facts and ideas, to combinations of them, it has always commenced its operations with general truths. The principles of grammar, yield in point of difficulty, to those of metaphysics alone. Children, universally, are made to lisp the rules of grammar; and often the mysteries of metaphysics. Discipline, inhumanity, and cruelty, would bind them down to these dreadful employments during a considerable portion of the common term of life, if the greater part did not sink under the hands of their executioners. You will be shocked at the intimation: but you will believe

be convinced, when you have attended a little more to the subject, that the miseries and deaths committed by schoolmasters and governesses, have been numerous and enormous. The effects of tyranny and cruelty are not equally obvious to all men in such cases. The complaints of infancy are feeble, and easily suppressed; or converted into silent despair. The restraints, anxieties, and miseries, which consume and destroy children, are slow and imperceptible; but certain and fatal in their effects.

Rousseau is, therefore, moderate in my opinion, when he only says, that the time is lost and misemployed, when abstract and general truths are forced on the memory in infancy: he should have reprobated those unfeeling

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ing and inhuman parents, who consign their offspring to a lingering death, with a chance that one in a thousand of them may learn the language of Greece or Rome. I speak from actual observation and knowledge: for I have seen a child's constitution effectually shattered, and ruined by the usual discipline in forcing the Latin grammar on his memory: and the complaints in the head and liver so common, and so fatal in their consequences at almost all schools, are the effects of an unnatural, preposterous, and cruel system of education.

I have the honor to be, &c.

London, May 24

1783.

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LET.

## LETTER III.

MADAM,

**I** Consider your difficulties, in the order you have stated them; and I perceive they are in the order which Rousseau has given his subjects in the second book of his Emile.

You find a reluctance in representing violent passions as diseases, in the usual sense of the word; and I should have supposed it, from the genuine candour and simplicity of your mind. The thought is philosophical and true in its first conception; but managed by Rousseau in the attempt to reduce it to practice, so as to render it ridiculous

culous and exceptionable. An irregular passion, like an irregular pulse, is unquestionably a disorder; and the moral like the medical process, to prevent or cure it, is often difficult and tedious. If any account must be rendered to children of the various appearances of excessive passions; nothing better can be imagined than the truth,—‘that they are disorders to which some men are liable through negligence, misbehaviour, or misfortune.’ But Rousseau means his lesson as a deception, which I am glad to find, all his art cannot recommend to you.

According to the general doctrine in Emile, it is not necessary we should attempt to explain all appearances to children, or answer all their questions.

Passions, which immediately affect or injure them, they soon acquire some notions of, whether denominated diseases or faults: those which do not, seldom excite their curiosity; or if they do, it is not difficult to induce them to suspend the gratification of it. I agree with you, therefore, in disapproving Rousseau's manner of treating his pupil, on the presumption that violent passions are bodily diseases, in the usual meaning of the phrase; as I do of every species of deception, though practised on children, who may not be in danger from a discovery.

Mr. Rousseau, with a discontent, perhaps bordering on petulance, is inclined to attribute to the perverse institutions of human society, the necessity



cessity he is under of allowing to children, before the golden Epoch of twelve, any idea of morality. His fancy is intent on dividing life, as it would divide a circle, into exact and determinate portions. To every division he assigns certain faculties and duties which are to spring up precisely at one point; and to cease or change their operations precisely at another. This theoretic precision must be forgiven in a man who had been a recluse for a great part of his life; who came out occasionally into society; was offended at its abuses: and retired to meditate on them, in a manner that will be of considerable benefit to the world. But nature seems not to observe any thing like mathematical precision in many of her processes. And if Rousseau had entered into the

concerns of a farmer, in the several seasons of the year, his impatience, at their irregularity, would have pressed hard on his piety; as he could not well have imagined a pretence for laying the blame on human societies. As in the year, the seasons run into each other, and are so variously blended as not to admit of precise limits; as their products are forwarded or retarded, blended or kept distinct, according to the effects of extraneous circumstances: so in life the general periods and the occupations suited to them, will not admit of fixed boundaries. Though infancy be not the season for moral principles and duties, yet they will sometimes appear like forward and tender fruits; and this without blame on human society; which I think, the ingenious author is, at all times,

times, too apt to reproach. It has faults and miseries in abundance to answer for ; and it may on many occasions, force premature faults in the moral world. But the neglect of what we call precision, and deem a beauty, in the arrangement and division of the periods of human life, and their respective productions, is to be found in nature, in numerous instances ; where the institutions and errors of human societies cannot have the smallest influence.

However, though Rousseau is petulant, at the necessity of attending to those productions and appearances he deems premature ; his method of managing and cultivating them, is ingenious and judicious beyond example. The transaction with Robert the

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gardener \* after Emile had sown beans among his melons of Malta; and the ideas of property and justice which naturally and beautifully arise from it, is a lesson which stands alone, among all the productions of writers on education. It is so truly in nature, that the contemplation always interests and affects me: and to be the author of a series of lessons on that principle, which would comprehend the general purposes of education, or the general elements of knowledge and virtue, I would relinquish the highest fame that has ever been obtained by man.

Rousseau, either was not sufficiently sensible of the peculiar importance and merit of this lesson, or felt the difficulty of applying the principle of it  
to

\* Page 210, &c.



to a variety of cases: for when he made slight efforts in that way, he suddenly broke off, and excused himself from detail; *i. e.* he excused himself, from the only difficulty in writing on education, to give examples or demonstrations in detail of general principles. The principles are understood, or they are allowed; but the method of reducing them to practice, and directing the application of them to an indefinite variety of cases, by that skill which may be called the average or general portion of human abilities, still remains to be minutely and compleatly described.

You seem extremely anxious, on the subject of deceit or falsehood: and you justly observe, that children are so generally addicted to it, as to give  
some

some pretence for ascribing it to a natural depravity. All *slaves* are lyars, without an exception in a million; and surely nature is not answerable for slavery and its vices. It is owing to the species of authority which is exercised over children, that they have recourse to this vice. They wish to evade a tyranny which they cannot resist; and associating generally with servants who have been viciously educated, they receive directions and assistance for that purpose. ‘ It is certain, that falshood in matters of fact ‘ is not natural to children, but the ‘ law of obedience produces the necessity of lying; because obedience ‘ being painful, it is dispensed with in ‘ private as much as possible; and the ‘ present interest to avoid chastisement ‘ or reproach, is more powerful than a ‘ distant

' distant interest arising from speaking  
 ' truth. In a natural and free educa-  
 ' tion, why therefore should your child  
 ' deceive? You never reprehend;  
 ' never punish; never exact any thing  
 ' from him. Why should he not re-  
 ' late to you, every thing he does,  
 ' with as much openness and sincerity  
 ' as to one of his little companions?  
 ' He cannot apprehend more danger  
 ' in such a confession, from the one  
 ' than from the other.'

' Deceit in matters of right, is still  
 ' less natural; as all promises to do, or  
 ' to abstain are conventional, are foreign  
 ' to a state of nature, and derogate  
 ' from its liberty. Besides, all the  
 ' engagements of children are void of  
 ' themselves; because, not being able  
 ' to extend their limited view beyond  
 ' the

‘ the present, they know not what they  
 ‘ do, in making engagements. It is  
 ‘ hardly possible for a child to be guilty  
 ‘ of a lie, in entering into an engage-  
 ‘ ment; for thinking only of disen-  
 ‘ gaging himself for the present, all  
 ‘ means which have not an instant ef-  
 ‘ fect must be to him equal: in pro-  
 ‘ mising for a future time, he promises  
 ‘ nothing; and his imagination being  
 ‘ yet dormant, he knows not how to  
 ‘ extend his existence to two different  
 ‘ periods of time \*.’

But some of your friends are more  
 concerned for the piety than the vera-  
 city of your children: they are ex-  
 tremely offended at the levity and air  
 of satire with which Rousseau treats  
 this subject, and charge him with im-  
 piety,

\* Emile, p. 221, 222.



piety, and the desire to promote irreligion. I do not mean to justify his manner, or his phraseology. ‘ Children \* being made to *mutter* or *gab-ble* prayers,’ is meant as a satirical shaft, and levelled at the bosom of an officious and imprudent parent. I do not applaud such a mode of correcting and removing errors. But, that there is a sentiment in all the works of Rousseau, bearing the slightest tendency to impiety, I deny, on the most scrupulous and attentive examination of them. Rousseau, every where, betrays a tendency to enthusiasm in regard to religion. And, in the passage before us, he reprobates the method usually taken with children, because it gives them a disgust to religion ; and makes them wholly neglect  
its

\* Emile, p. 227.

its duties in future life. And can any person doubt this, even on a slight attention to the world? Is it possible to assign any other reason, for the general though silent aversion which men shew to religious duties? This is sometimes ascribed to the prevalence of infidelity; but infidelity does not affect one person in a million: the neglect of public worship is almost universal; and in my opinion can be referred no other cause than the disgust given to children by obliging them attend to it, when they have no conception of its nature or utility. Rousseau's design was to reprove the propostitious custom of giving this disgust, under religious pretences; and thereby secure in future life the influence of piety: but his zeal betrayed him into an intemperate mode of expression;

pression ; and he has been charged by many, besides your friends, with an intention to injure that religion, which he certainly meant to serve.

You say, you cannot acquiesce in that abstract of morality, with which he concludes his episode, or digression, on the social principles and duties of children. ‘ The only lesson of morality proper for children, and the most important to all persons, is, never to do evil to any man. Even the precept, to do good, if not subordinate to this, is dangerous, false, and contradictory. Who is he, that doeth not good ? All the world do good ; the wicked man, as well as others, he makes one happy at the expence of making a hundred miserable : and thence arise all our calamities. The most

‘ most sublime virtues are negative;  
 ‘ they are also the most difficult, be-  
 ‘ cause they are without ostentation,  
 ‘ and even above the pleasure, so grate-  
 ‘ ful to the human heart, that of send-  
 ‘ ing away another content with us.  
 ‘ O what good is necessarily done to  
 ‘ his fellow-creatures, by that man,  
 ‘ if such a man there be, who never  
 ‘ does them harm! What intrepidity  
 ‘ of soul, what vigor of character are  
 ‘ necessary for this purpose? It is not  
 ‘ by reasoning on this maxim, it is by  
 ‘ endeavouring to put it in practice,  
 ‘ that we can feel how grand, and how  
 ‘ arduous it is to succeed in it \*.’

The difficulties of this passage arise  
 principally from the disposition to sur-  
 prize and alarm by apparent contra-  
 dictions,



dictions, which you must often have observed in the author. ‘ The man  
 ‘ who is most active, when he proceeds  
 ‘ on wrong principles, is the most injurious.’ This would, probably, have been Sir Isaac Newton’s method of stating a proposition applicable to a given subject. Rousseau, as if to provoke contradiction, would have said, ‘ He who does most, does nothing,’ or, ‘ he who does nothing, does most;’ and would have given a particular truth the air of a general principle. He knew, and I fancy he wished the world to exclaim; and he retired, from what he called the voice of persecution, to invent more paradoxes.

In the present paragraph, after having justly observed that the precept of doing good, if not regulated by that

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of

of not doing harm, is dangerous and contradictory, he exclaims, What good is *done* by the man who *does no harm*? By exercising violence on the customary forms of language; and use of words, he obscures his meaning; and renders himself either unintelligible or obnoxious to most of his readers. The utmost merit, of not doing harm, is that of affording others opportunities of doing good; and all civil laws have this for their object: because the active principle of doing good to ourselves and friends would otherwise render the good of one man the evil of another. But this does not prove what Rousseau asserts, that negative are more *sublime* than positive virtues; they may require more calmness of temper and constancy of mind; and may in some cases be more difficult to practise: but  
the

the lesson, 'to do good,' always involving in it that of 'not doing harm,' is certainly not inferior to it in utility, or importance.

I hope you do not expect me to determine the question in the Note, 'Whether a good or a wicked man are the fittest for solitude?' I wish to attend you, as little as possible, in the regions of meer fancy.

I have the honor to be, &c.

London, May 31,  
1783.

## LETTER IV.

MADAM.

THE custom of obliging children to commit fables, tales, poetical passages, &c. to memory, is too absurd and too evidently injurious to find advocates among any of your friends. They seem much disposed, however, that your children should learn to read early; and think Rousseau's directions for teaching them are not sufficiently explicit and practicable.

What books are they to read? And on what subjects can books be written, to be intelligible and interesting to children?



children? Rousseau hints that mes-  
sages, having a reference to their amusements and pleasures, may be so contrived as to impel them to the greatest industry. This is true; and the example given is the most practicable and pertinent that can be imagined. But I object to the application of it to the purposes of reading, so early as it seems to be allowed, even by Rousseau. The sense of its utility may be excited, preserved, and strengthened by such measures, as he advises. But I am satisfied, from the most attentive experience and reflection, there are not many customs so injurious to children, as teaching them to read, before it is possible they should understand the subjects, on which books are, and must, commonly, be written.—

The art of reading requires an indefinite, but considerable degree of practice. And there are not; perhaps it may not be possible to furnish, a sufficient number of books for this purpose, which may be intelligible to children. If it be said, children are to be taught reading, as an art to be applied to use in future time: This is recurring to the error which has been already reprehended; that of multiplying pains and labour by anticipating them. Besides, it has the particular inconvenience of fixing a habit most hurtful to knowledge; and which the strongest resolution can hardly remove—that of reading the *words* without attention to the *ideas* and *meaning* of an author. This is an infirmity so common, that hardly any man thinks it a proper subject of complaint.

plaint. It is attributed to the general imperfection of human nature ; to the intrusion of passions and cares ; and to the forcible impressions of outward objects. I do not mean to affirm, that these causes will not interrupt the attention of the reader. But they have no relation to the evil I complain of—that of reading the words of an author faithfully, and for considerable periods of time, without attending to his sentiments. This happens most commonly, if not always, when the mind is not forcibly impressed by occasional sensations, or diverted by passions. When these causes operate, the mind is roused and made to feel its error. In the case I refer to, it obeys a powerful but vicious habit ; and I am satisfied it employs men for years in what is called reading books, without the

slightest advantage.—Being of a studious disposition; and at the same time desirous to avoid the consequences of a sedentary life, I have had occasion to pay particular attention to every thing which obstructed my utmost information in the least possible time. I can easily distinguish all occasional and forcible interruptions, whether external or internal, from a general habit of *mèer reading*; which I cannot wholly correct, by any management or resolution, and which I can refer to no cause, but that of being taught to read books before I understood their contents. I find, on enquiry, this evil infesting my acquaintance, without a single exception; and I know nothing so favorable to ignorance; as it misemploys the most precious moments of a man's time without



out reproach or blame, or any sentiment which might induce him to correct it: and almost always reduces him to the necessity of sacrificing his health in the attainment of learning.

Rousseau is therefore, in my opinion, highly to be commended for every attempt to discredit the custom of teaching children to read early. In communities, where the advantages of reading are numerous and obvious, children will, in general, be desirous of acquiring, before they are capable of applying it to use. As to Rousseau's directions, I think them explicit, and practicable. ' Present interest! ' this is the grand motive; the only ' one which impels with certainty and ' effect. Emile sometimes receives notes ' of invitation, from his father, mother,

' ther, relations, or friends, to a din-  
 ' ner, a walk, a party on the water, or  
 ' to see some public festival. These  
 ' notes are short, plain, explicit, and  
 ' well-written. It is necessary he  
 ' should find somebody to read them  
 ' to him. Such a person may not al-  
 ' ways be at hand at the proper time ;  
 ' and he may be as sparing of his com-  
 ' plaisance to the child, as the child  
 ' had been to him in the preceding  
 ' evening. Thus the occasion, the  
 ' moment is lost. The billet is read  
 ' to him afterwards ; but the opportu-  
 ' nity is no more. Ah ! if he had  
 ' been able to read it himself !—Others  
 ' are received : they are so short ; and  
 ' the subject is so interesting, he would  
 ' endeavour to decypher them : he  
 ' sometimes finds assistance, sometimes  
 ' is denied it. He takes great pains,  
 ' and

‘ and in time decyphers half the billet ;  
 ‘ he finds it is intended to go the next  
 ‘ day to eat cream—but he cannot learn  
 ‘ where, or with whom—what efforts he  
 ‘ will make to read the remainder?—  
 ‘ We learn with great certainty and  
 ‘ expedition, what we are not impor-  
 ‘ tuned to learn. I am almost sure,  
 ‘ that Emile will read and write per-  
 ‘ fectly before the age of ten ; because  
 ‘ I give myself little trouble that he  
 ‘ should before fifteen. But I had  
 ‘ rather he should never learn to read,  
 ‘ than purchase that knowledge at the  
 ‘ expence of every thing that would  
 ‘ render it useful. Of what use would  
 ‘ reading be, when a child is disgusted  
 ‘ with it for ever \* ?’ On another oc-  
 casion he has the following just and  
 important observation †. ‘ I do not  
 ‘ imagine

\* Emile, p. 276.

Ibid. p. 325.

‘ imagine there is any thing for which,  
 ‘ with a little address, we may not ex-  
 ‘ cite an inclination, or even a pas-  
 ‘ sionate desire in children, without  
 ‘ vanity, emulation, or jealousy. Their  
 ‘ vivacity and imitative spirit are suffi-  
 ‘ cient; and especially their natural  
 ‘ gaiety; an instrument of which we  
 ‘ may always have a sure hold; but of  
 ‘ which no præceptor has thought fit  
 ‘ to avail himself.’

You will perhaps think it extraor-  
 dinary, that the circumstances which  
 have hitherto engaged your attention,  
 are only introductory to the proper  
 subject of this book; and if you had  
 disciples of Aristotle among your ac-  
 quaintance, you would have as many  
 objections to his taste and skill in com-  
 position, as you have to his hints for  
 the treatment of children.

After



After representing abuses and errors in glowing colors; and occasionally scattered truths and problems of the highest importance: after delineating a plan of moral discipline and instruction, which the customs of modern societies may render necessary in the premature season of infancy; he opens his subject in the following manner: The Vestibule is the largest portion of the building. But Rousseau having purposes to serve by such an arrangement, disregarded the rules of his art.

‘ A child is of a smaller dimension  
 ‘ than a man; he has neither his  
 ‘ strength nor his reason; but he sees  
 ‘ and hears as well, or nearly as well:  
 ‘ his taste is as sensible, though less  
 ‘ delicate; and he distinguishes odours  
 ‘ as well, though he does not annex  
 ‘ to them the same sensuality. The  
 ‘ first

‘ first faculties which form and per-  
 ‘ fect themselves in us are the senses.  
 ‘ They are therefore the first which we  
 ‘ should cultivate : but they only are  
 ‘ usually forgotten, or they are neglect-  
 ‘ ed the most.

‘ To exercise the senses is not merely  
 ‘ to make use of them ; it is learning  
 ‘ to judge rightly by them ; it is, if I  
 ‘ may so express it, learning to feel :  
 ‘ for we touch, we see, we hear, only  
 ‘ as we have learned.

‘ There is a kind of exercise purely  
 ‘ natural and mechanical, which serves  
 ‘ to render the body robust, without  
 ‘ affecting the judgment : to swim, to  
 ‘ run, to leap, to whip a top, to throw  
 ‘ stones ; all these are useful : but have  
 ‘ we only arms and legs ? Have we  
 ‘ not

' not likewise eyes and ears; and are  
 ' these organs unnecessary to the use of  
 ' the former? Do not exercise your  
 ' strength only, but all the senses that  
 ' direct it; draw from each of them  
 ' every possible advantage; and ascer-  
 ' tain the impression of one by that of  
 ' the other. Measure, reckon, weigh,  
 ' compare. Employ not your strength  
 ' till you have estimated the resistance:  
 ' always contrive that an estimate of  
 ' the effect may precede the use of the  
 ' means. Let your pupil see his in-  
 ' terest in never making insufficient,  
 ' or superfluous efforts. If he is thus ac-  
 ' customed to foresee the effect of all his  
 ' movements, and to rectify his errors  
 ' by experience, is it not clear, that  
 ' the more exercise he uses the more  
 ' judicious he becomes \*.'

He

\* Emile, p. 331.

He pursues this idea, through the several provinces of the senses; and gives a few lessons to exemplify his principles.

His directions are important for cultivating the sense of feeling; as well as his observations on the blind, who by this cultivation can always find the way; whereas those who have the use of their eyes can hardly move without apprehension and danger in the night. It is a sense of this danger which has produced the common notion of spectres and ghosts; and this can be dissipated only by such cheerful precautions and amusements as Rousseau recommends.

He justly observes, that as the sight affects the judgment more than any of the  
the



the senses: it requires a considerable time to learn to see; and thousands pass their lives without having learnt it with any tolerable degree of accuracy and precision. It is, by carefully comparing the sensations of the eye with those of the touch, that we acquire just ideas of figures and distances. Drawing is very useful for this purpose: for we cannot estimate bodies by their appearances, unless we have some knowledge of drawing. His lesson on this subject, is that of a master: and it is succeeded by the most simple and elegant mode of teaching geometry which has ever been imagined. I will refer you to it by quoting its humorous and admirable conclusion. ‘ I shall never forget  
 ‘ having seen, at Turin, a young man,  
 ‘ who had been taught in his infancy,

H

‘ the

‘ the relations of out-lines and sur-  
 ‘ faces, by having cakes formed into  
 ‘ all the geometrical figures daily set  
 ‘ before him ; and being induced to  
 ‘ chuse among them. The little glut-  
 ‘ ton exhausted the art of Archimedes,  
 ‘ in finding out which form contained  
 ‘ the greatest \* quantity.”

You seem to have some reluctance  
 when you acquiesce in his observations  
 on speaking and singing. Peruse that  
 part of the work again, and I think  
 it will not leave a doubt in your mind,  
 that the common method, particular-  
 ly in female schools, of teaching  
 little children to read and declaim  
 with emphases and passions to which  
 their hearts must be total strangers ;  
 and that of keeping them years in  
 learn-

learning complicated and learned passages from musical opera's, is cruel as it is absurd.

His observations on appetite, diet, and on the sense of smelling, are sometimes fanciful, sometimes ingenious: but I think the subject receives no considerable improvements from his pen.

He then leads us towards the conclusion of this important part of his subject, in the following manner.

‘ Supposing, therefore, that my  
‘ method is that of nature, and I am  
‘ not deceived in the application of  
‘ it; we have conducted our pupil  
‘ through the region of sensations, to  
‘ the confines of puerile reason. The

‘ first step we take beyond these, should  
 ‘ be that of a man. But before we  
 ‘ enter on this new career, let us cast  
 ‘ our eyes for a moment over that we  
 ‘ have just passed. Every age, every  
 ‘ state of life has its proper perfection ;  
 ‘ a sort of maturity suited to itself. We  
 ‘ have often heard of a man in a state  
 ‘ of maturity ; let us consider a child  
 ‘ in a similar state : this object may be  
 ‘ a greater novelty to us, and perhaps  
 ‘ not less agreeable.

‘ The existence of finite beings is  
 ‘ so poor and so limited, that when  
 ‘ we see them only as they are, we  
 ‘ are little affected. We must have  
 ‘ Chimæra’s to adorn real objects :  
 ‘ and if imagination did not add a  
 ‘ charm to those which strike us, the  
 ‘ barren pleasure we should feel, would  
 ‘ be



' be confined to the organ, and would  
 ' always leave the heart cold. The  
 ' earth decorated with the treasures of  
 ' Autumn, exhibits riches which the  
 ' eye admires; but that admiration is  
 ' not affecting: it proceeds more from  
 ' reflection than from sentiment. In  
 ' the spring, the country almost nak-  
 ' ed, is only obtaining things to cover  
 ' it: the woods afford no shade, and the  
 ' verdure is but just shooting up; and  
 ' yet the heart is touched at the ap-  
 ' pearance. In seeing nature thus re-  
 ' newed, we feel ourselves reanimated;  
 ' the images of pleasure surround us.  
 ' Those attendants of voluptuousness;  
 ' those soft tears which ever accom-  
 ' pany delicious sentiments, are ready  
 ' on our eyelids. But the prospect of  
 ' vintages, however animated, lively,

‘ and agreeable, are always beheld with  
 ‘ a dry eye.

‘ Why this difference ? Because, to  
 ‘ the prospect of the spring, the  
 ‘ imagination joins that of the sea-  
 ‘ sons which may succeed : to those  
 ‘ tender buds which the eye perceives,  
 ‘ it adds the flowers, the fruits, the  
 ‘ shades, sometimes the mysteries  
 ‘ which they may conceal. It unites  
 ‘ in one point, scenes which are suc-  
 ‘ cessive ; and sees objects not as they  
 ‘ are, but as it wishes them to be ; for  
 ‘ it has the power of selecting them.  
 ‘ In autumn, on the contrary, we see  
 ‘ no more in idea, than in fact. If  
 ‘ we would anticipate the spring, win-  
 ‘ ter intervenes, and the chilled ima-  
 ‘ gination expires on the snow and  
 ‘ frost.

‘ Such

‘ Such is the source of that charm,  
 ‘ which attends the contemplation of  
 ‘ promising infancy, in preference to  
 ‘ the perfection of mature age. When  
 ‘ is it we taste a real pleasure in view-  
 ‘ ing a man ? It is when the remem-  
 ‘ brance of his actions, makes us take  
 ‘ a retrospect of his life, and present  
 ‘ him young again before our eyes. If  
 ‘ we are obliged to consider him as he  
 ‘ is, or to suppose him such as he will  
 ‘ be in old age ; the idea of declining  
 ‘ nature effaces all our pleasure. There  
 ‘ can be none, in seeing a man ad-  
 ‘ vancing with hasty strides, to his  
 ‘ tomb : the image of death involves  
 ‘ every thing in deformity.

‘ But when I represent to myself a  
 ‘ child at the age of ten or twelve,  
 ‘ vigorous, well formed for his years ;

‘ every idea he excites is agreeable,  
 ‘ whether regarding the present or the  
 ‘ future. I see him, his spirits in a  
 ‘ state of ebullition, lively, animated,  
 ‘ without corroding care, or painful  
 ‘ precaution, enjoying a plenitude of  
 ‘ life, which he seems disposed to dif-  
 ‘ fuse around him. I foresee him, in  
 ‘ an advanced age, exercising that  
 ‘ sense, that genius, and those powers,  
 ‘ which daily unfold themselves, and  
 ‘ every instant afford some new indi-  
 ‘ cations. I contemplate him an in-  
 ‘ fant, and he pleases me. I imagine  
 ‘ him a man, and he gives me still  
 ‘ more pleasure: his ardent blood,  
 ‘ seems to give new warmth to mine.  
 ‘ I seem to live in his life, and grow  
 ‘ young again in his vivacity.

‘ The clock strikes—what a change!  
 ‘ In an instant his eye loses its fire;



‘ his gaiety is destroyed : farewell to  
 ‘ joy and play. A severe and ill-  
 ‘ natured man takes him by the hand,  
 ‘ and saying, gravely, *come Sir*, leads  
 ‘ him away. The chamber to which  
 ‘ he is conducted, is furnished with  
 ‘ books. Books ! what melancholy  
 ‘ furniture for one of his age ! The  
 ‘ poor infant suffers himself to be drag-  
 ‘ ged ; casts a look of regret on every  
 ‘ object around him ; is silent ; and  
 ‘ departs with eyes swimming in tears  
 ‘ he dares not shed, and his heart  
 ‘ swelling with sighs he dares not  
 ‘ vent.

‘ O thou ! who hast nothing of the  
 ‘ kind to fear ! thou, to whom no time  
 ‘ of life, is a time of restraint and  
 ‘ weariness ! thou, who seest the day  
 ‘ arrive without inquietude, the night  
 ‘ without

' without impatience; and countest  
 ' the hours only by thy pleasures—  
 ' come, my happy, my amiable pupil,  
 ' console us by thy presence, for the  
 ' departure of that unfortunate—  
 ' come!—He is here. I feel at his  
 ' approach, a sensation of joy, of which  
 ' I see him partake. It is his friend,  
 ' his comrade; it is the companion of  
 ' his sports, whom he accosts: he is  
 ' very certain, that on seeing me he  
 ' will not be without amusement:  
 ' we are not dependent on each other;  
 ' but we always agree; and are never  
 ' so happy with any other persons, as  
 ' when we are together.

' He is arrived at the maturity of  
 ' infancy; he has lived the life of a  
 ' child, and has not purchased the per-  
 ' fection he has attained at the expence  
 ' of

‘ of his happiness: on the contrary,  
 ‘ both have concurred in his educa-  
 ‘ tion. Even in acquiring the know-  
 ‘ ledge and understanding of his age,  
 ‘ he has been as free and happy as his  
 ‘ constitution would permit: so that  
 ‘ if Providence should deprive us of  
 ‘ him, in the blossom of our hopes,  
 ‘ we shall not have, at once, to la-  
 ‘ ment both his life and his death:  
 ‘ our sorrows will not be aggravated  
 ‘ by the remembrance of those which  
 ‘ we have occasioned him: we shall  
 . ‘ have it to say, at least, that he en-  
 ‘ joyed life in his infancy; and that we  
 ‘ did not deprive him of any of those  
 ‘ good things which nature bestowed  
 ‘ on him.’

I have thus obeyed your commands,  
 respecting the second book of Emile,  
 I with

with all the attention I could bestow. If I afford you any assistance in reconciling your friends to a mode of education so essential to the happiness of your family, I shall be compensated for a species of anxiety which attended the composition of these letters; and which I do not remember to have felt on any other occasion. I considered myself as engaged to give opinions which would have immediate effect, in confirming your resolutions, if not in obtaining the approbation of your friends, on the most important subject in human life. This induced me to review the judgment I had formed of Rousseau's general plan: and though I found additional reasons for believing it to be suggested by the obvious appearances and directions of nature; yet the petulance  
and



and (I must own) the vanity of the writer, having stated it, as if with an intention to excite wonder, contradiction, and give offence; the prejudices so generally formed on this account; the mischievous errors men had fallen into, who adopted his system without understanding it; and the hazard of my increasing the evils I wished to remedy—often determined me to decline the undertaking.

Volumes may be written on general subjects, without experiencing any such embarrassment: and it is very probable, that Rousseau, composed a work, which may in time be instrumental in effecting a total revolution in the education of mankind, without any of the uneasiness which

which I felt lest I might injure instead of benefitting a particular family.

I have the honor to be, &c.

June 7, 1783.



